



Illustration by Jeanne R. Janish,
From 'Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest'

ASTRAGALUS CERAMICUS VAR APUS **PAINTED MILKVETCH**

Painted Milkvetch is a slender, wiry perennial with trailing or ascending stems, 3-20 cm long, arising from long, widely spreading, rhizome-like rootcrown branches. Alternate, pinnately compound leaves are 2-17 cm long and have 0-4 pairs of narrow, stem-like lateral leaflets. Foliage is sparsely covered with unbranched, short, white hairs. Flower stalks are 2-8 cm long, each with 2-15 widely-spaced flowers. Pea-like, white flowers have an erect upper petal, 6-11 mm long, and a calyx, 3-6 mm long, sparsely covered with long white or black hairs. Egg-shaped, inflated fruits, 15-50 mm long, are mottled purple or green. They often lie on the ground like miniature balloons that pop when squeezed or stepped on. Flowering in late June-July.

The wiry leaves, sandy habitat and inflated, mottled fruits distinguish this species from all other *ASTRAGALUS* in our area. There are two varieties of this species in Montana; the hairs of *A. CERAMICUS VAR APUS* are unbranched, while those of the more common Great Plains taxa *A. CERAMICUS VAR CERAMICUS* divide in two right at the base.